

RELIGIOUS ART IN THE NIEVOLE VALLEY

Destination: Massa - The Town Council Museum of S. Michele. **Pescia** - The Cathedral of S. Maria Assunta: various works. The Church of S. Francesco: the altarpiece of S. Francesco. **Lamporecchio** - The Church of S. Stefano: the della Robbia altarpiece. *We also advise visits to:* **Monsummano Terme** - The Museum of the City and the Territory. **Castelvecchio di Pescia** - The Parish Church of Ss. Tommaso e Ansano. **Lamporecchio** - The Church of S. Maria Assunta at Orbignano and the Church of S. Giorgio at Porciano.

The Town Council Museum of S. Michele, Massa



The Museum is arranged in some rooms adjoining the Chapel of the Convent of the Nuns of St. Francis of Sales in the main square of Massa, a suggestive and historic village in the Nievole Valley. The interior contains some particularly valuable works of art, like the

canvas, attributable to the bolognese painter **Luigi Crespi**, of the *Presentation of Mary in the Temple* or the late 17th century wooden choir. The chancel instead contains a series of display cases with some priceless liturgical vestments, while the adjacent rooms host a large number of beautifully made religious furnishings, including a 17th century monstrance in silver. The Chapel of the Convent moreover, richly adorned with painted stucco decorations, forms an integral part of the museum route.

How to get there:

by car, from the motorway exit for Montecatini Terme: turn right. At the stop sign, turn left into the Sr436 in the direction of Montecatini Terme. Continue along the main road for about 3 km and drive right through the centre of Montecatini, following the directions for Pescia. Turn left at the traffic lights after the race-course into Via Lucchese. Go straight ahead and then turn right at the traffic lights following indications for Massa and Cozzile. Turn left at the junction for Le Croci and carry on as far as Massa. We advise you to park in the car park outside the village and to reach the museum on foot following the directions.

Info and reception: Museum of S. Michele

Piazza Cavour, 1/A - Massa - tel. 0572 928354 (Cultural Office - Town Council of Massa e Cozzile)

Opening hours and prices: from Jun 1st to Sept 30th Sat Sun and hols 1.30-7pm - from Oct 1st to May 31st Sat Sun and hols 3.30-6.30pm - entrance free

The Cathedral of S. Maria Assunta, Pescia



Built as a parish church annexed to the Diocese of Lucca, the church was promoted to "Prelatura Nullius" in 1519 and then raised to the rank of Cathedral in 1727 after the foundation of the Diocese of

Pescia. The church is the result of numerous reconstructions. The traces of wall-facing on the left-hand side and the bell tower date from mediaeval times, though the principal transformation of the building dates from the mid 17th century when the church was reconstructed, probably after an undocumented collapse. The great façade in Neo-classical taste instead dates from the last century.

The interior is elegant and severe in aspect and contains some extremely valuable works, such as the remains of the mediaeval pulpit, the sundial on the presbytery floor, the canvas of the *Virgin and Saints* by **Luigi Nofrini** of 1852, the 18th century *Nativity of the Virgin* by **Giuseppe Bottani** and the 17th century painted urn of Roman provenance. However the Cathedral of Pescia is not renowned for these works alone, but in particular for the splendid Chapel of the Holy Sacrament, the patronage of the **Turini family**. One of its members, **Baldassarre Turini**, who worked in Rome as a

datary for the popes and was a real art expert, purchased a painting on wood, known as the *Madonna del Baldacchino*, by **Raphael** from a Florentine family. This most important work remained in the chapel until being purchased by Prince Ferdinando dei Medici in 1697. According to popular tradition, at the moment of the removal of the Raphael original, Turini's sculpted marble image, which until then had been lying down on his tomb, miraculously awoke for a second, and turned its back on what was taking place. The *Madonna del Baldacchino* was replaced by a copy by **Pier Dandini**.

How to get there:

by car, from Massa: continue along the Via Provinciale Colligiana in the direction of Cozzile; keep to the left at the turning for Malocchio and then carry on, going past Colle di Buggiano. Turn left at the crossroads to reach the junction with the Sr435/Strada Regionale Lucchese. Turn right here and carry straight on towards Pescia as far as the Porta Fiorentina (Florentine Gate). Keep on this route as far as Piazza del Duomo. The Cathedral stands on the righthand side of the street.

Info and reception: Cathedral of S. Maria Assunta

Piazza del Duomo, 16 - Pescia - tel. 0572 476805

Opening hours and prices: Mon Tues Wed Thurs Fri and Sat 9-12am and 4-6pm; Sun 9-12am - visits to the Cathedral are suspended during services - entrance free

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The Church of S. Francesco, Pescia



Dating from the 12th century and in Gothic style, apart from other treasures, the interior contains an extremely valuable work of art: the altarpiece portraying *St. Francis and six episodes from his life* that was painted by **Bonaventura Berlinghieri**, a painter from Lucca, in 1235. The painting on wood is particularly important because it was carried

out only a few years after the death of the Saint and for this reason traditionally believed to be the very first portrait of the Poor Man of Assisi.

How to get there:

on foot from the Cathedral of Pescia: head towards Piazza della Maddalena and then turn right into Via Cesare Battisti. Keep going straight on, going past the hospital, to reach Piazza S. Francesco. The church is on the right hand side.

Info and reception: Church of S. Francesco

Piazza S. Francesco - Pescia - tel. 0572 476046

Opening hours and prices: the church is only open in the afternoon 3-5pm and 6-7pm - entrance free

The Church of S. Stefano, Lamporecchio



The interior of the church, of modern construction, contains an altar frontal with the *Visitation between Ss. Sebastian and Rochus*, in glazed polychrome terracotta in the right-hand transept, the work of **Giovanni della Robbia** carried out between 1524 and 1525. The altar, commissioned by the people of Lamporecchio in thanks for their protection after an outbreak of the plague,

portrays the two figures of the Virgin Mary and St. Elisabeth, with Ss. Sebastian and Rochus, who interceded on the occasion of the epidemic of the dreaded pox, at the sides. The altarpiece is considered one of the finest works in the pro-

duction of Giovanni, the last of the masters from the Florentine della Robbia workshop, thanks to the complex and articulated composition and the high artistic quality reached in certain parts of the work (especially in the centre group with the *Visitation*).

How to get there:

by car, from Pescia: go back towards Montecatini Terme and from here continue in the direction of Monsummano Terme and then continue along the Via Empolese. Turn right at the traffic lights at the end of Via Empolese and continue as far as the roundabout and from there, follow the directions for Empoli/Fucecchio. At Castelmartini turn left into Via Monsummanese and carry straight on following directions for Larciano/Lamporecchio. Once at Lamporecchio, drive through Piazza Berni, continuing along the main road for about 400 m, then turn right into Via S. Stefano.

Info and reception: Church of S. Stefano

Via S. Stefano, 4 - Lamporecchio - tel. 0573 82079

Opening hours and prices: entrance free - visits are not allowed during services

We also advise visits to:

The Museum of the City and the Territory, Monsummano Terme (tel. 0572 954463) contains the collection of priceless religious furnishings from the **Treasure of the Basilica of Maria Santissima della Fontenuova**.



The ancient **Parish Church** dedicated to **Ss. Tommaso e Ansano**, mentioned in documents from 879, is worth visiting at Castelvechio, just outside Pescia. The façade is divided

into two superimposed orders and decorated with zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures. This form of sculpted motif can also be found in the capitals dividing the naves of

the church. An ancient crypt covered with cross vaults can moreover be seen beneath the area of the presbytery.

The Church of S. Maria Assunta can be found at **Orbignano**, near Lamporecchio; the interior contains some extremely precious art works, among them some frescoes by the **School of Giotto**, the *Madonna of the Thorn-bush*, a 14th century sculpture in wood portraying the Virgin Mary enthroned with her Son, and a refined bas-relief of the Madonna and Child in white marble by the **School of Donatello**.

The interior of **the Church of S. Giorgio** at **Porciano**, in the borough of Lamporecchio, contains a precious painting on wood of the *Madonna and Child between S. Anthony Abbot and S. Nicholas of Bari* that was carried out by **Gerino Gerini**.